



JOE SHIRLEY, JR.
President

FRANK J. DAYISH, JR.
Vice-President

THE NAVAJO NATION

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Contact: George Hardeen
Communications Director
Office – 928-871-7917
Cell – 928-309-8532
georgehardeen@opvp.org
georgehardeen@yahoo.com

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., honored as top Native educator by American Indian Services

LEHI, Utah – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., was honored as the top Native leader in education at the American Indian Services annual fundraising banquet and auction here Tuesday.

"We're honoring the outstanding Native American in education," said Dr. Dale Tingey, executive director of AIS for the past 40 years. "Because no one has promoted education like President Shirley."

Arriving with Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley, President Shirley said he understood he would say a few words at the banquet but was surprised to be honored with this recognition. He was presented with a honor song and an elaborate beaded lance adorned with hawk feathers made by Navajo artist Julius Chavez.

"Education is our number one priority on Navajoland," he told about 700 people in attendance. "It is that because I believe education is the way to get back on one's own feet. The Navajo Nation was once a very powerful nation, a very sovereign nation, a lot of pride, very fierce, very independent."

He said his vision and belief is to see the Nation regain that and that education is how it will happen. He credits his own education with enabling him to have been a successful tribal court advocate, social worker, director of the Navajo Division of Social Services and an elected official with 38 years of service. He holds a master's degree in social work from Arizona State University and an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from Northern Arizona University.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., is presented with a beaded and feathered lance designed and made by Navajo artist Julius Chavez. President Shirley was honored by American Indian Services for being the outstanding Native American leader to promote education. At left is AIS Director Dale Tingey and First Lady Vikki Shirley.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., AIS Director Dale Tingey, and Navajo First Lady Vikki Shirley at the AIS Banquet and Auction at Lehi, Utah.

"Trying to get back on our own feet should be a goal in life, if not *the* goal," he said. "If there's going to be an investment by our brothers and sisters who are gathered here, what better investment is there than education?"

Over the years, American Indian Services has provided scholarships to 25,000 Native students. This year's auction brought in \$21,700 for a Mini Cooper, \$5,200 for a round of golf with golf great Johnny Miller, and tens of thousands more for dozens of donated art works, paintings and get-aways.

The need for Navajo scholarships is still one of the greatest cited by Navajos year after year. Despite 17,000 applications, there was funding available for only 6,000 last year. He said AIS has helped tremendously and is one avenue to close that gap.

Mrs. Shirley said earning a bachelor's degree was a life's goal for her that was finally made possible after she received an AIS scholarship.

"This is something that I always wanted," she said. "I was the first in my family to get a college degree."

She graduated from Northern Arizona University with a degree in business.

She said President Shirley re-established the Office of the First Lady in 2003 and she has devoted her work to promoting Mothers Against Drunk Drivers while decreasing DUIs and domestic violence and promoting literacy.

Both she and the President thanked AIS and their donors for their care and generosity.

"I don't believe I can say thank you enough on behalf of our Navajo and Native student," President Shirley said. "You have a very generous heart. Every time I come up here, I feel family, a power, a love. I get inspired again."

Since 1958, American Indian Services has provided scholarships and other services to Native Americans. IRS status as a private non-profit foundation was obtained in 1981.

AIS is headquartered in Provo, Utah, and governed by a volunteer executive board that includes educators, business people, and community leaders from across the country. Additionally, satellite boards have been established in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Nevada, Idaho, and Southern Utah. These boards oversee the operation of AIS in their geographical areas, provide community projects and educational seminars, assist students with scholarship applications, and organize various fundraising events.

All money received from donors goes directly to our programs for Native Americans. Administrative costs are minimal and are completely covered by donations from board members.

For more information, go to www.americanindianservices.org.

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